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School Committee Minutes Special Meeting Public Hearing **02/15/2011**

Approved by the Arlington School Committee April 12, 2011

Arlington School Committee
Special School Committee Meeting
FY 12 Budget Public Hearing
Tuesday, February 15, 2011
Arlington High School Auditorium

Present: Mr. Joe Curro, Chair, Ms. Leba Heigham, Vice Chair, Ms. Cindy Starks, Secretary, Mr. Thielman, Mr. Joseph Curran, Dr. Kirsi Allison-Ampe and Mr. Judson Pierce.

Dr. Kathleen Bodie, Superintendent, Dr. Wallis Raemer, Interim Assistant Superintendent, Ms. Diane Johnson, Chief Financial Officer, Ms. Linda Hanson, AEA Representative, Karen Fitzgerald, Administrative Assistant.

Absent: Mr. Mark Ryder, Director of Special Education

Mr. Curran arrived at 8:24 p.m.

Mr. Curro welcomed everyone to hear the FY 12 Budget and introduced everyone sitting at the table. Mr. Curro thanked Mr. David Ardito and Mr. Pat Tassone for providing the student artwork and student music and thanked Mr. Skidmore and the custodial staff and ACMI for providing the set up for the meeting.

Dr. Bodie presented the FY 12 Superintendent's Proposed Budget for Arlington Public Schools.

The FY 12 proposed reductions budget is the sixth straight annual budget which has required service reductions at the School Department. The reductions have included administration, support staff, facilities, educational supplies and materials, curriculum leadership, student support services and direct instruction.

The FY 12 Level Service Budget, created at the request of the school committee and the town manager, but not planned to be implemented given the current budget environment, keeps all of our current teachers, staff, programs and services at current levels and this would be higher than the FY 11 Budget.

The Arlington Public Schools would need \$46,535,421 in FY 12 to provide a Level Service Budget to maintain all School services next year but our expected funding is \$43,676,821, which only funds the FY 12 Proposed Reductions Budget. Dr. Bodie said we must reduce our services to meet our funding for FY 12, which is a cut of \$2,858,600.

Cuts in prior years have been made to every area before turning to teacher reductions. Dr. Bodie's priorities for students include: providing a core curriculum which includes are, music and health programs, supports teaching and learning through direct support to teachers, including K12 curriculum leadership, provide social/emotional support for students, maintain current level of special education programs and services and to comply with state regulations.

The impacts on students would be increased class sizes; reduction in social/emotional support and class offerings and special classes will be reduced. The positions reduced in the FY 12 Proposed Reduction Budget include administration 3.35, teachers 46,

support staff 5.4 and traffic supervisors 9.5.

The uncertainties going forward that would affect the budget are State Aid, Town Meeting and MSBA approval of Thompson Reconstruction, Pay as you throw, potential override income, health insurance benefits, scheduling and course selection, enrollment growth, contract negotiations and open legal issues will all impact this budget as we move forward.

Public Comments

Mr. Greg Tighe, student at high school spoke about the class sizes and the difficulties this poses in classroom management and too many directed studies.

Mr. Doug Teeter said that we set the bar too low in the FY 11 level services, class sizes are to large and that the town should make the schools a priority.

Ms. Katherine Gandek-Tighe said the School Committee should look more at the high school students so they are prepared to attend and graduate from college.

Ms. Sharon Wilke mother of two high school juniors is concerned with the reductions in guidance and with the availability of classes for seniors and supports and override. She also asked Superintendent Dr. Bodie to explain \$650,000 in legal fees.

Ms. Amy Speare, Bishop Parent is concerned with inequity in elementary class sizes and the possible reduction of teachers at the Bishop School. She has asked the School Committee to create options and look at redistricting. Ms. Speare realizes the Town has no more money and suggested the Board of Selectmen look into it.

Mr. Doug Burden, parent would support an override if employees would switch to GIC and move the schools forward.

Ms. Pam DiBona, Thompson School parent is familiar with level funding, state budgets and asked if we think all problems would go away if we close the Thompson School early and is very concerned that the Thompson School would not be rebuilt. Ms. DiBona asked the School Committee to consider a balanced budget before closing the Thompson and supports an override.

Mr. Jan Rogers, Thompson and high school parent wants parents to be aware of large class sizes and the difficulty for special education students in those classrooms, the accreditation issue of the high school could send more students to Minuteman which would cost the town more money, and the reduction of Traffic Supervisors.

Mr. Josh Lobel, parent of sophomore and college student spoke on the past cuts at the elementary level, librarians, and large class sizes and how these are all adding up and said we are cutting too much.

Cristin Orson, parent of two at Thompson Elementary expressed his concern with closing the Thompson school and that the neighborhood would be without a school and asked about what savings would be made by doing this.

Mrs. Olivia Scheller, Thompson School parent is very concerned at the class sizes at the Ottoson Middle Schools and the proposal of closing the Thompson School and wants to see the Budget for FY 12 without the Thompson School cuts, and is upset that this has already been decided parents and are forced to accept it.

Ms. MaryEllen Aronow, parent of two elementary boys asked the School Committee not to cut ACE last year, worked on Bridge the Gap and is now asking the School Committee to think about changing and developing a back up budget with a different model and suggested accepting parents involvement and have parent coordinated help at the schools.

Ms. Alex Hoffinger, parent of 2 boys at Hardy was depressed coming to the meeting and is not feeling any worse and said the standards for Arlington Public Schools is now going below the standards with all the elementary large class sizes, cutting clusters and the high school reductions being proposed.

Ms. Karen Pieroni, parent of high school and middle school students was concerned with the large class sizes and the amount of employees in the Administration area and requested job descriptions for each. She suggested cutting them to fund teachers, supports GIC health care, and freezing teachers' salary increases. Ms Pieroni suggested that parents transport their own children to cut the transportation budget.

Ms. Carol Callette, parent of high school and elementary school is terrified to hear class sizes of 35, the reduction of clusters at the middle school and supports an override/pay as you throw and would like the Town to choose which direction they choose to go.

Ms. Danuta Forbes, parent of Brackett student asked for a vision and a 5-year budget projection. She also requested that the School Committee look at the demographics and capacity at the Ottoson Middle School and wonders how the town will be able to handle all the families moving into Arlington. She also spoke about the many directed studies students have the concern with sports, arts and music programs and asked to come together with the town and make a vision for the community.

Ms. Annette Brubaker, Fourth Grade Bishop Teacher spoke of the low morale with teachers and the large class sizes for the students and more than 25 will not fit in her classroom. Ms. Brubaker was concerned with students with social anxiety and suggested everyone focus on creative and innovative ways to look at the budget and appreciates the hard work of the Superintendent.

Mr. David Moore, Art Teacher, Arlington High School for 12 years was concerned that we are losing sight of the children. He suggested stipends of \$200,000 be shown in the budget and to look at how budget stipends could be cut to preserve teaching jobs. He suggested more adult supervision at the high school.

Ms. Rosanne Casazza President of Traffic Supervisors is here speaking on their behalf of them being reduced in the FY12 budget and suggested that the administration take a cut in pay and everyone should support having Traffic Supervisors to avoid any accidents. Ms. Casazza wants administration to be accountable when they make mistakes.

Mr. John Carrier expressed concern with the budget deficit numbers, and then asked if we are going to destroy our children's future for \$3.11 per student a day.

Mr. Lasell was concerned with the Allocations of the FY 12 Superintendent's Proposed Budget pie chart and the growth of Special Education and the cuts that continue each year. Mr. Lasell said we need to engage more parents, the town and the community into the process.

Dr. Bodie gave a brief summarization of parents and the community member's comments.

Dr. Bodie said she will look at inequities of the class sizes in each elementary school and said a Redistricting Committee will look at distribution of all students and said we have to provide MSBA with a plan and this will include all elementary schools too.

Dr. Bodie addressed the legal expense in the budget and said they must use lawyers but hopes that by hiring an in house Human Resource person that the schools could cut our legal costs. Other legal expenses are for potential judgments with the principal/teacher at the middle school and Special Education Legal costs.

Dr. Bodie said the town did increase money for the schools but we will not receive stimulus money this year

Dr. Bodie said she will meet with Thompson School parents to discuss closing the school early but if we don't receive the money from Town Meeting then we don't do the move. We are not solving budget problems by closing the Thompson School.

Dr. Bodie said Mr. Skidmore has notified NEASC regarding our cuts could put us on warning with our accreditation, and knows this is important and said we should have Librarians in a quality school system.

Dr. Bodie said she would like a 5-year plan but we would need to know what would be the baseline numbers and what would we need to do to sustain this for 3 to 5 years. Dr. Bodie said with all the cuts at the high school we have already created online courses and continue to look for more. Dr. Bodie agrees with comments to have coordinated parent volunteers and said it's essential for volunteers because the PTO's are already doing all they can.

Dr. Bodie said the administration staff is thin and cannot be cut anymore; transportation is mandated and must be provided to special education students and spoke on the added special education programs have helped us with our budget.

Dr. Bodie appreciated David Moore's comments on his passion for teaching and will look at stipends. Dr. Bodie appreciates all the Traffic Supervisors service over the years and this reduction has been a painful choice.

Mr. Curro thanked Dr. Bodie and Ms. Diane Johnson with preparing the budget.

Mr. Curro said the School Committee will take the next two weeks to review the budget and will meet at a Special School Committee Meeting on Tuesday, March 1, 2011 at 7:30 p.m. On Tuesday, March 8, 2011 at the Regular School Committee meeting they will discuss the budget and vote two recommended budgets. The School Committee will present the budget to the Finance Committee for a vote on March 16, 2011 at 7:45 p.m. There recommendation will go to Town Meeting in April then in May Town Meeting will vote the bottom line.

Mr. Curro thanked everyone for coming and closed the FY 12 Budget Public Hearing at 9:35 p.m.

Recess 9:35 – 9:47 p.m.

Consideration of Pre-School Tuition Adjustment

Mr. Curro had asked the Superintendent to speak on the consideration of Pre-School Tuition Adjustments that Mark Ryder presented at the last School Committee meeting. Dr. Bodie said Mark Ryder is ill tonight and would like committee to approve a five percent increase to the preschool tuition.

Mr. Thielman moved to approve the Pre-School tuition adjustment, seconded by Ms. Starks.

Voted: 5-2, Mr. Curro and Ms. Heigham voted no

Ms. Heigham had requested information on why there was a disparity to hourly rates for student attending 2, 3 or 5 days a week. Mr. Ryder did not provide a response to this.

Mr. Curro cannot vote the increase due to not enough information given to the committee members.

Dr. Bodie said that logistics in the disparity of hourly rates was to make it less expensive and more attractive for student to attend more days.

New Business

Mr. Curro thanked everyone for helping prepare for the Special School Committee meeting in the high school auditorium.

Adjournment

Ms. Starks moved to adjournment at 9:55 p.m. seconded by Ms. Heigham.

Voted: 7-0

Respectfully submitted by
Karen M. Fitzgerald
Administrative Assistant
Arlington School Committee/cs/jc